

Woman's Day and the American Library Association introduce you to four women entrepreneurs who got so much more from the library than books by Sally Stich

“the library helped me start my business”



Jessica Sequinot, 35

home Brooklyn, NY

her business Co-owner of Tot Stops
(totstops.com)

her library The Brooklyn Business Library

In the past two and a half years, Jessica Sequinot gave birth to baby Chloe *and* a new business: Tot Stops, which specializes in high-quality New York City T-shirts for babies and toddlers. Through an online group for new moms, Jessica met a children's book illustrator who shared her desire for starting a business—and her love of cool baby clothes.

The two women were developing their idea for artsy tiny tees when another online mom mentioned PowerUP!, an annual business-plan writing contest at the Brooklyn Business Library. “It was win-win, even if we didn’t come in first,” says Jessica. The contest not only had a cash prize, but the library also offered workshops on how to write a business plan and how to find info faster. In addition, they had lists of local business owners interested in mentoring startups.

To their surprise, Jessica and her partner won first prize—\$15,000 in seed money and \$5,000 in services: a membership in the Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce, free marketing help, and tuition for business classes.

Tot Stops launched in January 2007, and Jessica and her partner have sold T-shirts to NYC boutiques and on their website. Jessica still frequents the library—she now takes Chloe for story hour. “When you think of libraries, you think books and magazines,” says Jessica, “but there’s so much more. There’s almost nothing you can’t find—and no help you can’t get—at the library.” ►

Helen Oram, 61**home** Hudson, MA**her business** Co-owner of BookSaleFinder.com**her libraries** Hudson Public Library, Marlborough Public Library

Though Helen Oram has always been a library supporter, she had no idea that libraries, with their used book sales, would provide her with the business she's been running with husband Tom since 1994.

It started with Helen and Tom's empty-nest weekend ritual: scouring used book sales, particularly those run by libraries. Not only was it a nice social outing, but they bought books on obscure subjects and then donated them back. "Libraries count on donations for their sales," Helen says. "It's recycling at its best." She and her husband often ran into the same people and heard them talking about sales in other towns. "I realized there was no one source for finding all the book sales within driving distance," says Helen, "so Tom and I decided to self-publish a guide to New England book sales."

Not surprisingly, she turned to her two local libraries for books on self-publishing, and soon learned about cover design and marketing, paper quality and how to get books in stores. "It was the most valuable and rewarding education I've ever gotten," she says.

Using the *American Library Directory* for names, addresses and phone numbers, Helen and Tom launched *The Guide to Used Book Sales in New England*. To market it, she sent the book to newspaper reviewers—she even garnered the book a mention in *The New York Times Book Review*.

Then, in 1997, the Orams launched BookSaleFinder.com, a website that now lists 6,000 used book sales in America and Canada, and gets 200,000 page views a month. The site is free to browsers and libraries and is paid for by advertising, which means a grateful Helen is turning a profit. "None of this would've been possible without the generosity of the library." ►

HAS THE LIBRARY POSITIVELY IMPACTED YOUR HEALTH?

If the resources have helped with a diagnosis for you or a loved one, or improved your physical, mental or emotional well-being, tell us how in 700 words or less. Up to four women will be featured in an upcoming issue. Go to womansday.com/ala between Feb. 12 and May 11 for official rules.

jump-start your small business at the library

Here's how your library can help.

EXPERT ASSISTANCE Consider librarians your guides to the treacherous landscape of business research. They can point you to the best resources and save you time that you otherwise might waste digging in the wrong places.

REFERENCE BOOKS You'll probably have to write a business plan at some point. Libraries have books with models you can use, as well as guides for getting startup funding. Most provide an interlibrary loan service, so if you don't see what you're looking for, the librarians may be able to get it for

you from somewhere else.

WORKSHOPS Many offer free classes on topics such as how to use business databases and how to get grant money. Plus, they're a great way to network with other entrepreneurs.

PROPRIETARY BUSINESS DATABASES

Ask your librarian about the business database selection, collections of information you can query for an answer. They're often the same databases that large corporations subscribe to.

Celia Ross
reference & instruction librarian
Columbia College, Chicago

Donna Hrezo, 36**home** Steubenville, OH**her business** Owner, I Love 2 Organize (ilove2organize.com)**her library** The Public Library of Steubenville
and Jefferson County

What if you had a great idea for a business but no startup money? That was Donna Hrezo's challenge in 2001 when she filed the business name I Love 2 Organize with the state of Ohio. Her plan was to stay at her administrative office job and start a part-time, home-based organizing business, after learning the ropes of building one. What she didn't factor in were renovation costs for the home she'd recently moved to. "I had no extra money to start a company," she says, "and the hole in my home office ceiling meant I didn't have a functioning workspace either."

Donna turned to her library. She used the computers for Internet and e-mail access, and took seminars on starting a business—all for free. "The library saved me money when I had to tighten my belt," she says. As her business blossomed, she kept heading to the library to do research. She also attracted new clients thanks to an invitation to give annual organizing talks at library branches countywide.

Two years ago, Donna decided to quit her day job and jumped into organizing full time. She now juggles 10 clients at a time and serves Ohio,

West Virginia and Pennsylvania. "I still use the library to get books on tape for long rides," she says, using one of her own organizing tips: It's better to borrow than buy something you'll only use once.

Michele Onofrey, 46

home Waverly, PA

her business Onofrey

Financial Services

her library Abington

Community Library



Like many couples, Michele Onofrey and her husband trusted a financial advisor to care for their money. And like many, they didn't pay much attention until a major stock loss awakened them, in 2002.

"Then my husband suggested I watch over our money," says Michele, who was a housewife at the time, "but I needed to get educated." She became a regular at the library—reading *The Wall Street Journal* and *Barron's*—trying to absorb everything, from which funds to invest in to how big-name investors make picks.

Over the next four years, as her investments grew, she and some friends decided to form an investment research group. Then she and another member of the group branched off and decided to become investment advisor representatives, a job that required licensing and two difficult tests. "I had to learn how to study all over again," she says, "so I did what I used to do when I was younger—I went to the library, found a quiet corner and spread out my stuff."

When Michele passed her exams and became certified, the librarians, who had offered months of encouragement, were as thrilled for her as anyone. "The head librarian asked if my partner and I would do a financial seminar," Michele says, "and the PR they did for it was incredible." That seminar gave Michele some of her first clients. Today, two years after opening the business, she is operating in the black, success Michele attributes in large part to the library. "Besides all the information being free," she says, "it was an incredibly supportive environment, where the librarians really cared." **wd**